DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 370 397 FL 022 159

AUTHOR Iandoli, Louis J.
TITLE Italian for Business and Communication: Research Methodology and Creation of a Syllabus.
PUB DATE 93
NOTE 14p.; Paper presented at the Annual Eastern Michigan University Conference on Languages and Communication for World Business and the Professions (12th, Ypsilanti, MI, March 31-April 3, 1993).
PUB TYPE Guides - Non-Classroom Use (055) -- Speeches/Conference Papers (150)

EDRS PRICE MF01/PC01 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS Business Administration Education; *Business Communication; *Classroom Techniques; Course Descriptions; Higher Education; Instructional Materials; *Italian; *Language Research; *Second Language Instruction
IDENTIFIERS Italy

ABSTRACT

This paper discusses the development and content of a third-year Italian course entitled "Italian for Business and Communication," taught at Bentley College in Waltham, Massachusetts. Since there are few texts that focus on business Italian, the instructor conducted on-site research at three Italian companies in Milan. Observations and interviews were conducted at a cleaning supplies wholesale distributorship and two banks. Relevant materials, such as forms, advertisements, and other written communication were collected and formed the basis of handouts for students in the course. Through a combination of lectures, readings, and handouts, students analyze how companies function on a day-to-day basis. Individual modules focus on simulated business meetings, banking services, advertising, business correspondence, curriculum vita, and interviewing techniques. (MDM)

**********
* Reproductions supplied by EDRS are the best that can be made *
* from the original document. *
**********

ED 370 397

# Italian for Business and Communication: Research Methodology and Creation of a Syllabus.

U.S. DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION
Office of Educational Research and Improvement
EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC)

This document has been reproduced as received from the person or organization originating it.

☐ Minor changes have been made to improve reproduction quality.

• Points of view or opinions stated in this document do not necessarily represent official OERI position or policy.

"PERMISSION TO REPRODUCE THIS MATERIAL HAS BEEN GRANTED BY

Crotty

TO THE EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC)."

FL022159



BEST COPY AVAILABLE

Bentley
College
450 Beaver Street
Waltham, MA 02154-6270

Louis J. Iandoli, Ph.D.
Assistant Professor
Modern Languages

Office (617) 891-2195
Home (617) 232-8519

Thurs. April 1, 1993
11:00 –
12:30

Paper

**Italian for Business and Communication: Research Methodology and Creation of a Syllabus.**

Over the last five years, I have developed an oral proficiency-based language program at the elementary and intermediate levels of Italian at Bentley College. The majority of my students concentrate in business related areas and are interested in using foreign languages for international trade. Therefore, the four one-semester courses develop the skills of speaking, listening, writing, and reading with a focus on the functional use of the language in Italy and Italian speaking situations. In an effort to respond to the growing need for a course in Italian for commerce, I have developed a fifth semester course in Italian for Business and Communication. I chose the third year level rather than the fourth year for two practical reasons: 1) my students generally have limited space in their programs for more advanced courses in Italian and 2) students of Italian are increasingly expressing a need for such a course. Since the language learner still needs considerable study of grammar and the reinforcement of the four skills, Italian for Business and Communication reflects this need. Instead of using literature as the starting point for conversation and cultural studies, the course uses commercial-economic and related cultural situations. Students use business materials in Italian as a means of achieving both language proficiency and gaining knowledge of

F 702215 9

the world of Italian commerce.

There are a few texts in Italian for Commerce, but I needed to supplement them with a broad-based spectrum of information, realia, exercises, conversation and writing topics on which to base my course. In order to obtain first-hand information on Italian business communication, and to develop materials suitable for the third-year college level, I arranged to spend time in a few companies in Italy, and thus obtain information and materials on-site.

The two most rewarding and useful areas of examination in Italy were wholesale distribution and banking. These two topics illustrate the means of using the data thus gathered. Both topics cover a broad scope of business and language functions.

I wrote to heads of six companies in Milan and Rome, factory owners, wholesale distributors, a travel agent, a book store owner, and a merchant, three of whom invited me to spend three or four days on-site. I knew the people to whom I wrote through contacts or as personal friends. Since the idea of a foreign language course for business communication is not familiar to many business people, I was specific in stating my situation. Since Italian business people often assumed that I was preparing an upper-level course in business, it was necessary to make clear the level of language study for which I was seeking information. The letter stated that my background was in the humanities and language studies, and my research is on a linguistic and cultural level as it relates to commerce in Italy. I sent a list of topics which would be of interest for an Italian

for Business course[1]. These topics made clearer to business people the scope and nature of my research, consequently allaying fears that the visit would create excessive work for the employees.

My first contact was a wholesale distributor in Milan. The company buys household cleaners, ranging from mops and scrub pads to detergents, for distribution to supermarkets and large private companies. Some of the products are made pursuant to the distributor's orders, whereas others are bought in bulk from wholesalers. The distributor thus offered me exposure to a wide variety of commercial transactions and firms in general, since the company could not only be studied on location but also in its interactions with factories, ipermercati, other wholesalers and the people representing the firm in its transactions and negotiations.

The **on-site** research involved collecting materials which represent the varied activities of the organization. These realia serve as punti di partenza for students in the Italian business

---

[1]. The following is a list of topics which was sent to some of the company presidents to be interviewed:

1. La banca: i servizi della banca, come aprire un conto in banca.
2. L'informatica: I computer per gli affari.
3. La corrispondenza, lettere, formali, informali.
4. Come funziona un ufficio sul livello degli impiegati.
5. Una società italiana. Come funziona, com'è organizzata.
6. Il marketing e la pubblicità.
7. La contabilità: il livello semplice del cridito, debito, e tasse.
8. L'ufficio postale: mandare lettere, pacchi ecc. Come usarlo.
9. Vocabulario per importazione e esportazione, la dogana.

language class. For while they are learning technical vocabulary and idiosyncrasies of the business world, novices must be able to put their knowledge to first hand use, through acting out transactions, discussing them with hypothetical business associates and then writing up similar realia for the class and instructor. My goal was to gain first-hand knowledge of commercial vocabulary, transactions and cross-cultural differences that could serve the classroom teacher.

My plan was to study the following areas: product ordering and receiving, varied forms of billing, receivables, commercial correspondence, advertising, taxes and the employee make-up of the società.

I wanted to gather information in the corporation offices, and also see how the organization conducted transactions with its clients. Consequently, for my first two days with the Milanese firm, I went on the road around the Milan and Florence area, Bergamo and Prato, with a representative to wholesalers and to the companies which in turn purchase wholesale orders from the distributor. By so doing, familiarity was gained with the organizations whose bills, orders, letters and general correspondence I was later to read and analyze for class use.

In Bergamo, the company representative visited a supplier of household abrasives, detergents, mops, and rags. At this wholesaler, large orders were discussed, quantity and delivery dates were arranged, billing forms were filled out and numerous problems with taxes, IVA[1], were solved. The above exchanges

would later be referred to in paper work at the main office. Thus the realia would be substantiated by personal knowledge and experience.

In Prato, the company president and I visited a large factory which made orders of scrub pads and mops directly for his firm. As in Bergamo, orders were made, delivery discussed and prices negotiated.

Upon returning to the company in Milan, I examined how relations with clients were carried out in the office. The company supplied me with numerous copies of bills received and sent, as well as unused billing forms. With the help of marketing and billing representatives, I examined the forms to understand their use in pricing, ordering, abbreviations, taxation of products and simple contracts. We then photocopied commercial correspondence of various types: request for information on merchandise, disputing of orders, discussion of taxation, delivery negotiations, etc. The employees' explanations of the documents would serve as the subject of teaching, and the documents themselves would aid in realistic reenactment of company transactions in Italian.

At the same time, I collected diverse forms of advertising used by the firm to market its commodities. These advertisements could later be used in setting up student generated mock publicity campaigns for Italian companies. The corporation's president also explained the employee composition of the firm and the line of administrative responsibility. With the addition of a

sample curriculum vitae, I then had a substantial amount of information and materials to teach the basic linguistic functions and rudimentary business transactions in the company and allow for more realistic student generated Italian companies (see Forti-Lewis).

The next step in the research involved visits to Milanese banks: the first was small and dealt with private local accounts, local enterprises, loans and mortgages, checking, savings and automatic teller accounts and the second offered international services as well, with representatives throughout Europe and the U.S. Familiarity with banking services is certainly a priority for a business person in any country. Students need to know the differences in 1) processing banking needs and 2) the vocabulary necessary for fulfilling their financial obligations in Italy. Interviewing representatives of two banks offered differing perspectives, local and international, and allowed gathering of extensive realia. I collected applications for opening accounts, requesting a mortgage, acquiring a Bancomat card or credit card and forms required to demonstrate financial status and collateral.

With the information gathered in Italy, I was later able to provide extensive handouts for presentation and class discussion. The simple presentation of rules and requirements is not enough for the novice in commercial Italian. Extensive documentation permits a realistic study of the elements of Italian banking. Contextualization of the banking environment with documents that

would be used in real situations reinforces learning and acquisition of the language (Omaggio 91-120), preparing the novice to work in Italy with similar documents.

The following passages describe a partial course outline based on the research in Milan and Rome. (I assembled six modules ranging from three to four hours each. Though the course in fact has ten modules, the six following sessions are exemplary of the syllabus.)

COURSE OUTLINE

xx Through a combination of lectures, readings (Popescu; Harvard and Miletto), and copies of documentation, students analyze how the company orders, buys, distributes, bills and makes payments.[2] The students reenact commercial transactions using the realia gathered in Milan. Role playing permits the learner to take on the function of company president, wholesale salesperson, buyer, and accounts receivable and payable representative.[3] Each student has copies of the appropriate forms needed for his or her position. For example, the accounts receivable and payable representative uses billing and payment forms to request or make payment; the president writes simplified correspondence similar to letters of the real Milanese firm and the correspondence in Harvard and Miletto and Santagata. In one simulation, the president writes a memo to a salesperson or buyer requesting information on a product (quantity bought or sold) and the salesperson responds with a memo and copies of orders and bills. A subsequent meeting occurs between the president and salesperson

to discuss the product. From the combination of lecture, readings, discussions and reenactments, the learners draw closer to the experiences which they will have in Italy.

The third module, on banking services, presents the necessary information for opening a checking and savings account, writing checks, making deposits and withdrawals, applying for mortgages and loans, and obtaining Bancomat (ATM) and credit cards. Knowledge gained in this subject is best reinforced by immediate simulation of banking exchanges. In one helpful exercise, copies of applications to open checking accounts, and acquire Bancomat cards, and sample checks are used to recreate a scene between a bank employee and a new resident of Rome who wants to fulfill banking needs. As in the previous module, with the help of Italian documents, the novices recreate a mini-banking situation. In so doing, they are preparing themselves both linguistically and culturally for more productive work in an Italian city.

Module four, a study of Italian advertisements, draws from publicity, and from promotional brochures, flyers and letters from the banks, wholesalers and retailers. Students at this point have enough information about the companies both to understand the advertisements and recreate their own for American goods to be distributed in Italy. A comparison of advertisements for similar U.S. and Italian products helps the learner to identify cultural differences, vocabulary and targets (Carney 48), and thereby direct their goods to the Italian market. As Carney

states "There is no more immediate source of cultural touchstones than advertising" (48). Small groups of students can compare and analyze publicity for two similar products, one for an Italian market and another for an American market, and then present and debate their findings before the class. This exercise utilizes Italian, allows students to draw their own conclusions based on readings and discussions, and highlights the importance of identifying cultural differences.

The fifth module, "La Corrispondenza", utilizes letters acquired form Italian businesses, as well as extensive samples from Harvard and Miletto and Popescu. Since students will already have studied company organization, distribution, billing, banking and advertising, they should have the necessary background to write correspondence about their companies. Commercial correspondence gives the students extensive opportunities for feedback from the instructor on grammar, style, and usage, as well as commercial vocabulary. In keeping with the interactive nature of the course, participants of the reenactment take business roles and fulfill numerous functions through correspondence with each other: request information on products, file complaints, inform about new developments in the company, or establish contact with other firms. The instructor is their guide, cultural and language resource throughout this directed correspondence.

The sixth module draws logically from the preceding five: writing a curriculum vitae and interviewing for a job. The

students write letters for jobs in student-run companies, imitate a sample Italian curriculum vitae and finally perform a mock interview. As a capstone to this exercise, participants go to an Italian or an American firm in the Boston area which does business with Italy (Trivelli 3). They interview employees, in Italian, when possible, on their functions in the enterprise, and gather information on the firm's import-export business. This on-site work culminates in an oral presentation to the class and an oral exam-job interview with the instructor.[4] The final written exam, while testing vocabulary and knowledge of business functions and cultural differences, includes two simulations of business interactions in essay and dialogue form, e.g., the description of ordering wholesale products, delivery, payment, and sample dialogue interactions among business people in banking, sales, employee evaluations etc.

Since Italian for Business and Communication stresses equally the skills of speaking, reading, writing and listening, the final grade reflects the 50% oral and 50% reading, writing makeup of the syllabus: Participation in discussions, group work, attendance, 25%, oral midterm, 10%, final oral, 15%; compositions, letters, advertisements, 20%, midterm exam, 10%, final project report, 10%, and final exam, 10%.

By the end of the semester, through the varied use of original Italian documentation, texts on Italian commerce, and most importantly business simulations, students should have the basic skills to begin an internship in an Italian business or

work with firms where Italian is spoken. The learner should be able to begin work in Italy and perform financial tasks with minimum stress and confusion due to cultural and linguistic differences in the business domain. The linguistic and cultural acumen acquired will be the basis from which a career can be initiated. Though the novice will still have considerable work ahead in implementation of the language and commercial skills obtained in the course, the general background achieved in Italian for Business and Communication makes the on-site experience less stressful and more productive, for the novice and employer alike.

ENDNOTES

1. IVA: value added tax.

2. The Dizionario fraseologico commerciale, A. Duse is helpful for writing commercial Italian.

3. Team work needs to play a major role in teaching methodology for the students to gain maximum learning from the class experience (Carney 47-48; Forti-Lewis 2).

4. Additional modules cover 1) La Borsa, the Italian stock exchange, its organization and functions (The source for this module is Chapter 9 in Popescu, as well as instructor annotated, selected passages from Il nuovo come si legge il sole 24 ore (Galimberti) ) and 2) Chapter 12 of Popescu, telecommunications and computers in the Italian office.